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Assunto: Desmatamento da Amazônia no The Guardian

Disappearance of Amazon rainforest brings pledge of emergency action

John Vidal, environment editor
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The Guardian

The deforestation rate in the Brazilian Amazon, the largest stretch of forest in the world, has increased by 40% in the past year, according to preliminary figures released yesterday by the Brazilian government.

Almost 10,000sq miles (24,000sq km) of virgin forest - an area the size of Albania - were lost, mainly to soya farming and logging.

The figures do not include the destruction of the forest by fires which have been intense this year in some Amazonian states. "We are going to take emergency action to deal with this highly worrying rise in deforestation," said the environment minister, Marina Silva, a former Amazonian rubber tapper and environmental activist.

She promised to announce new measures to protect the forest, but environment groups fear that there is little that can be done unless new threats like industrial scale farming can be brought under control.

"These figures are the worst in many years. It is alarming how the agriculture frontier is growing", said a Greenpeace Brazil spokesman, Paulo Adario.

"Almost 80% of the timber is illegally felled, but clearing land for industrial soya farming is now taking over from timber extraction as the major driver of forest loss in some regions".

Most of the deforestation is taking place in the southern Amazon, where soya farming is rapidly moving in to Para and Matto Grosso states.

"It was a long, dry season, but the deforestation figures are at least 30 or 40% higher than historical trends," said David Cleary, director of the Amazon programme at the US Nature Conservancy in Brazil. "If ways are not found to minimise the impact of the spread of soya farming, it is difficult to see these figures falling in coming years," he added.

The soya boom has been fuelled by European consumers who have rejected GM soya from the US in favour of the conventionally-grown crop from Brazil. During the past three years, Brazil's share of the world soya market has risen from 24% to 34%, while the US share has declined from 57% to 43%.

Brazil is expected to overtake US production within five years, but it may be at the expense of the Amazon forest.

Destruction

A series of scientific reports have suggested that the Amazon forests, which are still 86% intact, face rapid future destruction because of interlinked climatic and human forces.

The previous Brazilian government planned to invest over \$US40bn (£27bn) in new roads, railroads, reservoirs, power lines and gas lines in the Amazon over the next few years.

This was expected to increase forest loss dramatically, and to make the forests more prone to destruction by fire. However, the present government has not yet committed itself fully to the plan.

Rainforests cover less than 2% of the Earth's surface, yet they are home to some 40 to 50% of all life forms - as many as 30 million species of plants, animals and insects. Up to 30% of the world's animal and plant species are found nowhere but in the Amazon, an area of 1.54 million sq miles (4.1 million sq km) - larger than western Europe.

Scientists issue a warning that its rate of destruction poses serious threats, not just in respect of lost species but by reducing production of oxygen and unpredictable consequences for global weather patterns.